



Australian Bureau of Statistics

6202.0 - Labour Force, Australia, Jan 2019 Quality Declaration

ARCHIVED ISSUE Released at 11:30 AM (CANBERRA TIME) 21/02/2019

The following article was first published 14 January 2019 in 6291.0.55.001. The media release which accompanied the original article can be found [here](#).

HOW MANY PEOPLE WORK ONE HOUR PER WEEK?

EMPLOYMENT STATISTICS

The ABS produces an extensive range of labour market statistics, among them employment, unemployment, underemployment and underutilisation. For the measure of employment, people are classified as employed if they worked one hour or more.

While on face value one hour may seem like a low threshold, it is important in counting everyone who is involved in production activities in the economy. This is in line with well-respected and regularly reviewed international guidelines.

It is, however, a measure of who is employed and not a measure of how fully employed people are, which is covered by other measures.

Underemployment is a particularly relevant measure for understanding the extent to which employed people are fully employed.

HOW MANY PEOPLE WORK ONE HOUR PER WEEK?

As Table 1 shows, in 2018, around 0.1% of employed people (that is, around 1 in 1,000 employed people) usually worked one hour per week. This proportion, as with the other proportions in this spotlight article, has not changed much in recent years.

The people usually working fewer than 4 hours a week account for around 0.8% of total employment (around 1 in 100 people), and people working fewer than 7 hours account for 2.8% (or around 3 in 100 people).

This means that around 97 in 100 people usually work 7 hours or more per week. Furthermore, around 87 in 100 people usually work 20 hours or more.

**TABLE 1. EMPLOYED PERSONS USUALLY WORKING LESS THAN 30 HOURS, 2018 AVERAGE
(ORIGINAL DATA)**

Usual hours worked per week	Employment	Share of total employment (%)
1	14,500	0.1
2-3	85,900	0.7
4-6	250,900	2.0
7-9	244,600	1.9
10-19	1,083,300	8.6
20-29	1,529,900	12.2

WHAT IF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY USED A DIFFERENT THRESHOLD?

Table 2 provides a basic illustration, using hours usually worked, of how employment statistics would change if an alternative threshold was to be used. For example, if people worked one day a week (7 hours), or half a day a week (rounded up to 4 hours).

Employment would be very similar, as would the employment to population ratio.

TABLE 2. ILLUSTRATIVE ESTIMATES USING DIFFERENT THRESHOLDS, 2018 AVERAGE (ORIGINAL DATA)

Threshold (hours worked per week)	Employment	Employment to population ratio (%)
1	12,600,000	62.2
4	12,500,000	61.7
7	12,200,000	60.4

UNDEREMPLOYMENT FOR THOSE WORKING RELATIVELY LOW HOURS PER WEEK

During 2018, underemployed people made up around 8.8-9.0% of all employed people (the underemployment ratio).

Table 3 shows that this was higher for people usually working relatively low hours per week, at around 1 in 3 people who were underemployed. This suggests that around 2 in 3 employed people were not wanting to work extra hours or were not available to do so.

TABLE 3. UNDEREMPLOYMENT FOR PERSONS USUALLY WORKING LESS THAN 10 HOURS, 2018 AVERAGE (ORIGINAL DATA)

Usual hours worked per week	Underemployment ratio (%)
1	32.4
2-3	36.7
4-6	34.1
7-9	30.1

THE IMPORTANCE OF CONSIDERING ALL RELEVANT MEASURES

Headline employment figures effectively show how many people are employed, but they alone cannot highlight whether people want more work, what their earnings are, and what employment conditions they are entitled to.

No single labour market measure can answer every question, which is why the ABS releases a broad range of information on a regular, frequent and timely basis, across more than 50 releases a year. We strongly recommend using the measures that best answer your question.

A full list of publications containing Labour Market data can be found in the Labour Statistics: Concepts, Sources and Methods (cat. no. 6102.0.55.001).

We are always available to help you find the measure you need, either by email at client.services@abs.gov.au or via the National Information and Referral Service on 1300 135 070. Media can contact the ABS Media hotline on 1300 175 070.

This page last updated 20 March 2019

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